

*A Short Anthology of Writings
about Psychedelics*

Edited by Ray Soulard, Jr.

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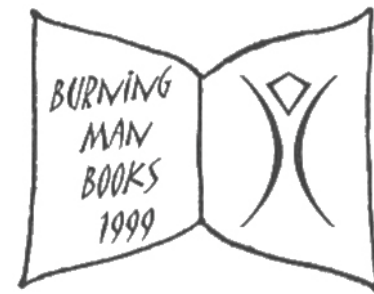


S C R I P T O R P R E S S

STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER:

A Short Anthology of Writings about Psychedelics

Edited by
Ray Soulard, Jr.



number five

For Aldous, with love.

STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER:

A Short Anthology of Writings about Psychedelics

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Strawberry Fields Forever

by John Lennon & Paul McCartney
© 1967

*Let me take you down
cause I'm going to strawberry fields
Nothing is real
and nothing to get hung about
Strawberry fields forever*

*Living is easy with eyes closed
Misunderstanding all you see
It's getting hard to be someone
but it all works out
It doesn't matter much to me*

*Let me take you down
cause I'm going to strawberry fields
Nothing is real
and nothing to get hung about
Strawberry fields forever*

*No one I think is in my tree
I mean it must be high or low
That is you know you can't tune it
but It's all right
That is I think it's not too bad*

*Let me take you down
cause I'm going to strawberry fields
Nothing is real
and nothing to get hung about
Strawberry fields forever*

*Always know sometimes think it's me
But you know I know when it's a dream
I think a "No" will mean a "Yes"
but it's all wrong
that is I think I disagree*

*Let me take you down
cause I'm going to strawberry fields
Nothing is real
and nothing to get hung about
Strawberry fields forever
Strawberry fields forever
strawberry fields forever*

A Commentary on LSD

by Alice Dee

© 1999 Drug Peace Campaign

LSD (D-Lysergic Acid Diethylamide, or Acid for short) can be a wonderful psychotropic ally, and is probably the most versatile psychedelic known to humanity. Its effects vary from simple stimulation, like a cup of coffee, that can facilitate intense focus for 8-ish hours at the 25mcg dose range (excellent for programming, writing, driving or listening to lectures) to a social, stimulating psychedelic in the 50-200 mcg range (great for dancing, concerts and walks in nature) to a frankly amazing, mystic entheogen in the 300-700mcg range (much more heroic than social, but great for communing with God/dess). Some people find that the intensity of the LSD experience tends to plateau at dosages over 500-700mcg, although its duration may continue to extend.

When readily available, LSD is also one of the best value-for-money psychedelics around, usually going for \$2.00 per 100 mcg 'hit' or 'dose' in the San Francisco Bay Area (often considered an epicenter for LSD production), although there are reports of people paying up to \$5.00 per 100mcg elsewhere. These 100mcg dosages are fairly standard in the US these days, but are significantly less than the powerful 300 mcg per hit dosages that were reportedly common here in the Sixties. The lower doses per hit usually available to US psychonauts these days have probably significantly reduced the frequency of uncomfortably strong LSD trips.

Today, LSD is most commonly found soaked into colorful blotter paper (an artform in itself), although sometimes it is available dissolved in liquid (usually calibrated to 100mcg per drop) or dissolved in colorful, hardened gel, when it is known as windowpane. It appears that the LSD-containing tablets of various descriptions that were around in the Sixties and early Seventies seem to be much less common these days.

Regarding storage, it is very helpful to keep LSD in a dark, cool place for long-term storage as it is not one of the more stable psychedelic molecules. Purity is also important, and can significantly affect the quality of the experience (especially at high doses), so it is often a good idea to bioassay a new batch at lower doses to test the purity. Quad pure LSD (implying that the product is washed four times, as was said to be the practice of legendary LSD maker Owsley, aka Bear) is usually the best around, but three washes are commonly considered adequate, especially since yield is reduced with each wash. LSD synthesis is quite complex and generally requires a pretty professional lab and chemist to synthesize quality product.

With moderate doses of blotter LSD, effects start to become noticeable within around half an hour after ingestion, and tend to rise to a peak around 2-5 hours into the experience. After the peak, the experience or 'trip' gradually declines in intensity until one is pretty much back to baseline in around 8-12 hours. The afterglow tends to last much of the following day and is usually described as quite pleasant.

LSD can be quite safely mixed with many other psychoactives for a wide variety of fascinating experiences. The combinations with phenethylamines such as MDMA (aka Ecstasy, which is known as candyflipping) or 2-CB (the 'erotic psychedelic') are especially enjoyable for social situations, and LSD also combines very synergistically with N2O (nitrous oxide or laughing gas) and DXM (dextromethorphan, a psychedelic component of many cough syrups) for more intense, although relatively non-social, experiences. Many people also report potentiation of LSD after pre-treatment with Harmala alkaloids or Melatonin. Mixed reactions have been observed when combining LSD with marijuana, so it is probably best to have a relatively straight sitter and a safe place to retreat to, just in case things get 'strange' on this combo.

The long-lasting duration of the LSD experience is also an excellent opportunity to get some deep meta-programming work done, so it has some very interesting psychotherapeutic applications (see Dr. Stanislov Grof's fascinating psychedelic research summarized in 'LSD Psychotherapy'). Many people deal with the extended length of the experience by taking LSD just after sunset so that they are in the tail end of the experience as the sun is rising, which nicely completes the trip.

A fairly well-established psychological phenomenon sometimes noticed by LSD users is known as imprinting. This is a psychological process whereby being exposed to an event, thought or other experience makes an impression on one's psyche. When the ego's strength is

diminished, as often happens during an LSD trip, one seems to become especially sensitive to imprinting, often on a much deeper level than usual. This can be helpful or not, so it is useful to be aware of it and to make sure the set, setting and company are optimal throughout the duration of the psychedelic experience.

It is also quite common for people to report that music perception is significantly enhanced while on LSD, so concerts and raves can be truly amazing and transformative events for the wide-eyed tripper, but it is advisable to have a relatively straight friend around as a designated driver and sitter, just in case things get uncomfortable. Also, paying careful attention to selecting music with a positive content is helpful to prevent unwanted negative messages from being imprinted.

One rarely feels like eating while on LSD, and it is usually best to take it on an empty stomach since digestion slows considerably while tripping. Nevertheless, candy, fruit and sorbet do taste absolutely wonderful while engaged in the experience. Also, sensitivity to pain and temperature is often diminished (LSD is actually quite a good pain-reliever), and a number of people have reported that sex on LSD is quite interesting with a trusted and familiar partner.

Incidentally, the much-publicized LSD flashbacks are largely a myth, and probably reflect a normal tendency for humans to revisit any intense psychological phenomena, especially if triggered off by a physiological response such as an adrenalin surge. If flashbacks (aka 'freebies') do occur, then many LSD enthusiasts tend to consider this a feature, rather than a disadvantage! :) Strychnine-containing samples of LSD are also a myth (with one possible exception reported by Albert Hofmann in 'LSD My Problem Child'), as are chromosomal damage and spinal fluid drainage with LSD usage. However, persistent tracers have been reported by a few people after excessive LSD indulgence (especially when combined with marijuana), but they do not seem to occur at all with moderate usage which is often reported to actually improve visual acuity. As with most substances that are pharmaceutically active, LSD is probably best avoided altogether during pregnancy, especially during the sensitive first trimester. However, at least one study seems to indicate that low, 100mcg doses do not appear to have noticeable negative effects on either mother or fetus.

Tolerance to LSD builds quickly, so refraining from dosing more than once a week seems advisable. LSD also seems to be cross-tolerant with psilocybin-containing (aka Magic) mushrooms. Also, due to the quick tolerance buildup and the seeming lack of dopamine involvement in its action, LSD is not considered physically addictive. In fact, it seems from recent DEA literature that pretty much the only excuse the government could come up with for placing it in Schedule I was 'unpredictable effects'. Interestingly, like flashbacks, most LSD enthusiasts actually consider these a feature. :)

It also seems best to take LSD in a safe, private setting at least until one is used to its effects since it can make other people appear a little 'strange' and can also make talking coherently a minor challenge as one's thoughts are often tumbling over one another in a hurry to be expressed. Being in the company of someone tripping on LSD can also be a bit disturbing to straight people, (even if they don't know that one is on LSD). However, there is nothing quite like being in a friendly crowd of people tripping on LSD. The energy is fantastic! Its also interesting that the elevated energy experienced on moderate doses may cause one's voice to take on a characteristic vibrato quality, possibly combined with nervous laughter. Knowing this, it is often possible for experienced people to tell if someone is on LSD just by listening to them talk. Its a totally different sound from the slow drawl of mushroom eaters, for example.

LSD is exceptionally safe and has no established lethal dose in humans, although one researcher apparently did manage to kill an elephant with a huge dose of it, combined with some subsequent ill-advised treatment. In part due to its activity in such minute amounts, LSD is also generally considered to display remarkably low toxicity in normal dosages. In fact, the literature reports that several people have each accidentally consumed as much as 5000 times the basic 100mcg dose (0.5g) and survived with no noticeable long-term damage. Furthermore, LSD has the distinct advantages relative to many plant psychedelics of being virtually tasteless and odorless, being quite easy on the body, and being very easy to conceal.

The pitfalls with taking LSD primarily occur on a psychological level. Uncomfortable experiences can result when people resist facing the dark side of themselves, letting go of their ego attachments, get into recursive negative thought loops, when unpleasant things happen to them or when they want to come down before the experience is ready to end. As befits a true psychedelic, what is inside a person often comes out on LSD, so best not to take it if you are in a negative state of mind. However, while some people do keep Valium around as an anti-anxiety agent to neutralize the effects of LSD in case things get uncomfortable, it usually seems

best to just face what LSD helps reveal about oneself, and be prepared to be stimulated and in an altered state for a good 8-12 hours. As an aside, engaging in dancing or other enjoyable physical activity is often a wonderful way to spend a trip or to bring an uncomfortable one out of the doldrums.

Occasionally people will experience so-called 'Acid Indigestion' on LSD, which is often easily alleviated by loosening tight clothing and by performing breathing and other relaxation exercises. Some folks consider this minor stomach upset a symptom of psychological blockage, and many people never experience it at all. However, while being remarkably physiologically safe, the main risk involved in taking LSD (besides the unfortunate fact that it is currently illegal) seems to be that real psychological trauma can occasionally emerge or occur under its influence. Hence LSD is not recommended (except perhaps in closely-monitored, therapeutic situations) for those with unstable or immature personalities, a strong attachment to their ego, pre-existing deep-seated emotional trauma, or a pre-existing tendency toward mental illness.

Nevertheless, given all of the negative press and biased government propaganda about LSD, it is quite an eye-opener to take it for the first time and to experience its (and one's own) Divine nature, not to mention how inaccurate the media's portrayal of it usually is. As many people discovered in the Sixties, it is a common reaction to one's first LSD experience to wish that the entire world could experience this very special Divine gift to humanity. However, its helpful to be aware that even the most conservative LSD initiates often have to refrain from the temptation to dose their straight friends, since dosing anyone without their permission is just not considered ethical behavior among psychonauts.

For those who are open to the experience, may the magic of LSD come your way!

Through Psychedelic Eyes

by William Braden

from *The Private Sea: LSD and the Search for God*

© 1967 William Braden

On a good trip the LSD voyager may feel he has penetrated to the godhead itself. But is it really the godhead he sees? Or is it the Medusa?

Before we describe what LSD does, let us first ask what it is. That is a much easier question to handle, admittedly, and it is mildly ironic that this is so. Where the mysteries of nature are concerned, the situation is usually reversed, as Bertrand Russell has pointed out in the case of electricity. Science can describe very accurately what electricity does but hasn't the foggiest notion what it really is. As for LSD, it is a synthetic drug: d-lysergic acid diethylamide tartrate, compounded from a constituent of a rye fungus known as ergot. Its general history by now is a twice-told tale and then some, so we shall be brief about it. LSD was first synthesized in 1938 by Dr. Albert Hofmann, a biochemist at the Sandoz pharmaceutical firm in Basel, Switzerland; but the scientist did not know what he had created until 1943, when he accidentally inhaled or otherwise absorbed a small amount of LSD and thus discovered the drug's curious properties. It produced uncanny distortions of space and time and hallucinations that were weird beyond belief. It also produced a state of mind in which the objective world appeared to take on a new and different meaning. These effects, and the agents which produce them, are now referred to as psychedelic — a generic term which means “mind manifesting,” which in turn means nothing. The word has come into common usage simply because of its neutral connotation; due to the controversy involved, it is the only word so far that all sides have been willing to accept. It is used as both noun and adjective.

Unlike heroin, opium, and alcohol, LSD apparently is not addictive. This means simply that prolonged use of the drug, so far as we can tell at this time, does not create a physiological craving or dependency based on changes in a subject's body chemistry — changes that are produced by liquor and junk — and there are no physiological withdrawal symptoms when use of the drug is terminated. LSD on the other hand may be psychologically habituating; but this, after all, can also be said of chewing gum and television.

There are literally scores of psychedelic substances, natural and synthetic, and LSD is only one of many agents capable of producing a full-fledged psychedelic experience. Identical effects can be obtained from Indian hemp and its derivatives, including hashish; from the peyote cactus and its extract, mescaline; from a Mexican mushroom and its laboratory counterpart, psilocybin, which Dr. Hofmann synthesized in 1958. Hemp and peyote have been used as psychedelics for centuries, and mescaline was on the market before the turn of the century. LSD's uniqueness lies in the fact that it is very easy to make — and mega-potent. According to the Food and Drug Administration, a single gram of LSD can provide up to ten thousand doses, each of them capable of producing an experience lasting up to twelve hours or longer.

Scientists seized upon the drug as a tool for research and therapy, and literally thousands of technical papers have been devoted to it. Since LSD appeared to mimic some symptoms of psychosis, it offered possible insights into the sufferings of mental patients — although psychotherapists later came to doubt that it produces what was first referred to as a model psychosis. Preliminary research indicated it might be useful in the treatment of alcoholism and neurosis, and it also served to ease the anguish of terminal patients. In small doses, in controlled situations, it appeared to enhance creativity and productivity. But the public at large knew nothing of LSD until 1963, when two professors, Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert, lost their posts at Harvard University in the wake of charges that they had involved students in reckless experiments with the drug. Leary went on to become more or less the titular leader of the drug movement, in which capacity he soon ran afoul of the law, and the movement spread to campuses and cities across the country. By and large, it seemed at first to develop as a middle-class phenomenon, attracting to its ranks mainly students and intellectuals, liberal ministers, artists and professional people, as well as bearded pariahs. Official panic provoked a wave of legislation which ended or seriously hindered almost all legitimate research programs; the legislation did little or nothing to discourage the drug movement, which received its supplies from black market sources.

Depending upon the point of view, Dr. Hofmann assumed the role of a Prometheus or Pandora. In correspondence I once asked him if he sometimes felt like the latter, to which he replied: "In my opinion, every discovery in the field of natural science is to be positively viewed, and thus also the discovery of LSD. If one wishes to deplore the discovery of LSD, then one must also view the discovery of morphine negatively, for morphine, one of the most valuable gifts of pharmacy, is just as dangerous and destructive as LSD when used improperly. There are no forces in the universe that are bad in themselves. It is always up to man whether he will make good or bad use of them." And if Dr. Hofmann's words have a familiar ring, perhaps they are reminiscent of the statements nuclear physicists were making in 1945.

LSD is a colorless, odorless, tasteless drug. It is taken orally for the most part, and the precise nature of its action upon the brain and nervous system has not been determined. It is believed, however, that only a minute portion of the tiny dose ever reaches the brain, and even this disappears in less than an hour. Possibly, then, LSD sets off a reaction which continues long after the drug itself has been dissipated. As Dr. Sidney Cohen, a leading medical authority on LSD, expressed it, "The drug acts to trigger a chain of metabolic processes which then proceed to exert an effect for many hours afterward." In hipsters' terminology, the subject is "turned on." And the experience begins.

The nature of the experience will depend on countless factors, which are commonly summed up as "set" and "setting": that is, the mood of the subject and the environment in which the drug is administered. The subject becomes highly suggestible, and the slightest false note can result in the nightmare of a bad trip. Most experiences will include a hallucinatory period, in which fantastic visions occur, and in some cases it is possible to see sounds and hear colors—the result of sensory short-circuiting, referred to in the literature as synesthesia. One subject reported that he could taste the categorical imperative (which he said was something like veal). These very weird effects have received considerable publicity; when they are pleasurable, they—and sometimes sexual stimulation—constitute what may be regarded as the "kicks" aspect of LSD. But the drug movement cultists are not concerned with kicks in this sense. Skilled travelers say they can avoid the hallucinatory period altogether and thus are able to achieve and prolong the "central experience." There does appear to be such an experience, and this is what the cultists refer to when they speak of a good trip. It does not always occur, and some people may never achieve it; it must be sought after, perhaps, and expectation may be a significant factor in its production. But it does exist, and it is the very basis of the cult.

From various sources, then, let us see if we can construct a typology of this central or core experience. While the problems of description are notorious, in most cases the mind will appear to operate at a new level of consciousness in which:

1. The sense of self or personal ego is utterly lost. Awareness of individual identity evaporates. "I" and "me" are no more. Subject-object relationships dissolve, and the world no longer ends at one's fingertips: the world is simply an extension of the body, or the mind. The world shimmers, as if it were charged with a high-voltage current, and the subject feels he could melt into walls, trees, other persons. It is not that the world lacks substance; it is real, but one is somehow conterminous with it. And it is fluid, shifting. One is keenly aware of the atomic substructure of reality; he can feel the spinning motion of the electrons in what he used to call his body, and he senses the incredible emptiness that lies within the atoms, where the electron planets circle their proton suns at distances which are comparably as vast as those in the solar system itself. Thus it seems only natural that one could pass through a wall, if only it were possible to get all the atoms lined up properly for just one moment. In the vastness of outer space, is it not a fact that billion-starred galaxies are able to drift through each other like clouds of smoke or astral ghosts, without the single collision of one star with another?

As for identity, it is not really lost. On the contrary, it is found; it is expanded to include all that is seen and all that is not seen. What occurs is simply depersonalization. The subject looks back on his pre-drug existence as some sort of game or make-believe in which, for some reason, he had felt called upon to assume the reduced identity or smaller self called "I." Being had concentrated its attention at a single point in order to create, and play, the game of writer, banker, cat burglar. Or so it now seems. If there is any analogy to this in normal existence, is it not perhaps the moment when one awakens from sleep? In that case, what is the first thing one asks oneself? "Where am I?" Or isn't it rather, "Who am I?" And then, in an effort of will, attention is concentrated to re-create the role that was lost in sleep. Thus in the drug experience, as in sleep, the normal state of tension is relaxed. Home at last, after that dreadful party, Being slips out of her stays, so to speak, and breathes an ontological sigh of celestial relief. Consciousness is allowed to scatter, and the subject at last can be Himself again.

The subject is somehow united with the Ground of his Being, with the life force that has created the visible world. He remembers. And what he remembers is the true identity that underlies all the individual egos of the world. He is one again with the universe, the eternal, the Absolute.

He has found himself again. He is made whole again. That which he once knew, he has remembered.

(But when did he know it? And when did he forget?)

2. Time stops. Or, in any case, it ceases to be important. And perhaps it would be more accurate to say that memory and forethought stop. The subject is content to exist in the moment—in the here and now. And time has no meaning in the here and now. Bergson suggested that the sense of time consists simply of arrests of our attention. Seconds and minutes do not really exist; they are artificially created "immobilities" dreamed up by science, which is unable to comprehend flux, mobility, or the dynamic character of life itself. Installed within true movement, said Bergson, the mind would lose its normal sense of time, since the normal function of the intellect is to foresee, so as to act upon things. "We must strive to see in order to see," he said, "and no longer to see in order to act." This is precisely what happens in the psychedelic experience, where forethought is anesthetized. Without forethought there is no anticipation. Without anticipation there is no desire. And time stops.

3. Words lose all meaning. In the here and now there are no abstractions. An object represents only that which it is. It is perceived as a *Ding-an-Sich*, a thing-in-itself, and it matters not whether Kant said that sort of perception is impossible. Kant never took LSD. If he had, he would have known that rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.

The same feeling is captured in childhood perhaps. As Wordsworth wrote, recalling his boyish days when nature was all in all:

... I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures.

The psychedelic experience is similar but multiplied at least a thousand times over. Coincidentally, Havelock Ellis wrote, after experimenting with mescaline in the 1890s: "If it should ever chance that the consumption of mescal becomes a habit, the favorite poet of the mescal drinker will certainly be Wordsworth."

But thing-in-itself perception is beyond all language. It is, in fact, the antithesis of language, which is the real cause of our normal inability to see the thing-in-itself. This is so because we think in words, and words are abstractions or symbols of things; as a result, we tend to think and perceive in symbols. Thus the American flag fluttering on the Fourth of July is seen in terms of Concord and Lexington. The flag-in-itself is never seen; we must always associate it with something else. And so on. And the English language is especially crippling because of its painful stress on simile and metaphor. Thus a rose isn't a rose; it's what my love is like. Ruskin quite properly attacked the pathetic fallacy as evidence of a "morbid state of mind." But the psychedelic experience suggests that all figures of speech reflect the same unhealthy attitude—and that speech itself is a web of deceit. The Greek poets sensed this. For the Greeks, as Edith Hamilton pointed out, a thing of beauty was never a symbol of something else, but only itself. A star was just a star, a primrose a primrose. "That a skylark was like a glow-worm golden in a dell of dew, or like a poet hidden in the light of thought, would have been straight nonsense to them. A skylark was just a skylark. Birds were birds and nothing else, but how beautiful a thing was a bird, 'that flies over the foam of the wave with careless heart, sea-purple bird of spring.'" And if symbols as such are deceptive, how much worse are

the symbols of use. We look at a peach, and we see something to eat. We look at a field, and we wonder how many bushels of wheat it will yield. We meet somebody for the first time, and we ask ourselves what this new person can do for us. Can we play bridge with him? Sell him some insurance? Worst of all, we look at our loved ones even in terms of our own needs, emotional and otherwise. In the terminology of Martin Buber, we live in the world of I-It. We associate things, and we use things, and we never look at the thing-in-itself in the here and now. Moreover, we cannot look upon an object without thinking the word which symbolizes it. Tree. Lamp. Table. But the psychedelic world is the world of pure experience and pure relation; it is the world of I-Thou. In this world, for example, a tree is not a source of timber or shade. A tree is to look at. And it is not a tree. It is that, there. Now. And that is a that is a that is a that.

4. There are no dualities. Sweet and sour, good and evil— these also are abstractions, inventions of the verbal mind, and they have no place in the ultimate reality of here and now. As a result, the world is just as it should be. It is perfect, beautiful. It is the same world that is seen without LSD, but it is seen in a different way. It is transfigured, and it requires no meaning beyond the astonishing fact of its own existence.

What does “meaning” mean anyhow?

Meaning is just one more abstraction, implying some future use or purpose; it has no place in the here and now of naked existence. And is this perhaps the significance of the Eden story? They ate of the tree in the midst of the garden, and their eyes were opened, and they became as gods, knowing good and evil. The first dualism, fundamental to all others. What does this story represent if not the introduction into the world of a new way of thinking and a new form of perception? What does it refer to if not the evolutionary product we describe so proudly as intellect, or the rational mind? What does it signify if not that moment when man looked about him and said for the first time: “This is wrong.” Not, “This hurts me,” or “The tiger is chewing my leg, and I wish he wouldn't.” No. “This is wrong.” What an idea! What a curious concept. No doubt it was the greatest, or worst, idea that man ever had. It marks that point in the process of becoming when life took charge of itself. Man had accepted the world; now he decided to judge it. Thus Adam became the first existentialist, taking upon himself the nauseating responsibility that turned Sartre's stomach. In doing so he laid the basis for those existential anxieties which are nothing more or less than ontological anxieties. He estranged himself from his environment; worse yet, he alienated himself from the very Ground of his Being. In Eden he had lived in perfect I-Thou relation, neither judging things nor subsuming them with words. East of Eden lay the world of I-It, where the ground was cursed for his sake, and the Lord told him what he could expect from it. Thorns and thistles he could expect from it. So Adam was cast out of the garden, his own mind the flaming sword that would prevent his return. He lived in the world of I-It, and he sought there for meaning. But he never found it, and none of those who came after him have found it.

Men are frustrated in the search by their I-It minds of use, which have made meaning synonymous with purpose. Nothing is meaningful unless it leads to something else, or produces some future effect. Thus a man smokes to enjoy himself— and that is a meaningless action. But he puts on his shoes so he can go to the store— and that by definition is meaningful. But it is not meaningful enough, and man craves for an ultimate meaning. He wants his life to lead to something else, somewhere in the future. It doesn't, apparently, so he feels the anxiety of meaninglessness. Taking hope, however, he diagnoses his anxiety as a form of psychic pain. The sense of meaninglessness is meaningful in itself, he decides; it implies there is a meaning somewhere, and he is estranged from it. Which is so. But the ultimate meaning he seeks is in fact the absence of meaning — in the sense of purpose. Meaning is simple existence in the here and now. And of course man already lives in the here and now. The trouble is, he doesn't know how to live in it. And this is what LSD seems to tell him. It tells him that he is still in Eden, if only he knew it. It is only necessary to spit out the apple and look at the world through psychedelic eyes. The apple is his intellect, or way of looking at things, and under LSD his intellect no longer functions. Forethought is put to sleep, and he opens his eyes upon Paradise regained.

A voice whispers in his ear. It tells him: “Essence precedes existence.”

5. The subject feels he knows, essentially, everything there is to know. He knows ultimate truth. And what's more, he knows that he knows it. Yet this sense of authority cannot be verbalized (any more than the experience as a whole can be verbalized) because the experience is a whole which cannot be divided, and it transcends all partial abstractions. What is known is pure Being, which cannot be compared with anything else. The subject is identical with that which he knows and therefore is speechless. In any case, language can never describe that which language itself is responsible for negating. Finally, there is the problem raised by H. G.

Wells in his tale of “The Richest Man in Bogota.” To a race of eyeless men, how do you explain sight? What words do you use?

This describes the psychedelic experience, produced by a chemical. But it also describes something else.

It describes religious mysticism.

It describes the experience of saints and prophets since the first tick of history's clock. And it describes as well those flashes of insight that sometimes come to humbler folk in moments of prayer, or of grace.

[from] The Doors of Perception

by Aldous Huxley

© 1954, 1955, 1956

"If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite."

William Blake

Thus it came about that, one bright May morning [in 1953], I swallowed four-tenths of a gram of mescaline dissolved in half a glass of water and sat down to wait for the results.

We live together, we act on, and react to, one another; but always and in all circumstances we are by ourselves. The martyrs go hand in hand into the arena; they are crucified alone. Embraced, the lovers desperately try to fuse their insulated ecstasies into a single self-transcendence; in vain. By its very nature every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude. Sensations, feelings, insights, fancies — all these are private and, except through symbols and at second hand, incommunicable. We can pool information about experiences, but never the experiences themselves. From family to nation, every human group is a society of island universes.

Most island universes are sufficiently like one another to permit of inferential understanding or even of mutual empathy or "feeling into." Thus, remembering our own bereavements and humiliations, we can condole with others in analogous circumstances, can put ourselves (always, of course, in a slightly Pickwickian sense) in their places. But in certain cases communication between universes is incomplete or even nonexistent. The mind is its own place, and the places inhabited by the insane and the exceptionally gifted are so different from the places where ordinary men and women live, that there is little or no common ground of memory to serve as a basis for understanding or fellow feeling. Words are uttered, but fail to enlighten. The things and events to which the symbols refer belong to mutually exclusive realms of experience.

To see ourselves as others see us is a most salutary gift. Hardly less important is the capacity to see others as they see themselves. But what if these others belong to a different species and inhabit a radically alien universe? For example, how can the sane get to know what it actually feels like to be mad? Or, short of being born again as a visionary, a medium, or a musical genius, how can we ever visit the worlds which, to Blake, to Swedenborg, to Johann Sebastian Bach, were home? And how can a man at the extreme limits of ectomorphy and cerebrotonia ever put himself in the place of one at the limits of endomorphy and viscerotonia, or, except within certain circumscribed areas, share the feelings of one who stands at the limits of mesomorphy and somatotonia? To the unmitigated behaviorist such questions, I suppose, are meaningless. But for those who theoretically believe what in practice they know to be true — namely, that there is an inside to experience as well as an outside — the problems posed are real problems, all the more grave for being, some completely insoluble, some soluble only in exceptional circumstances and by methods not available to everyone. Thus, it seems virtually certain that I shall never know what it feels like to be Sir John Falstaff or Joe Louis. On the other hand, it had always seemed to me possible that, through hypnosis, for example, or auto-hypnosis, by means of systematic meditation, or else by taking the appropriate drug, I might so change my ordinary mode of consciousness as to be able to know, from the inside, what the visionary, the medium, even the mystic were talking about.

From what I had read of the mescaline experience I was convinced in advance that the drug would admit me, at least for a few hours, into the kind of inner world described by Blake and AE. But what I had expected did not happen. I had expected to lie with my eyes shut, looking at visions of many-colored geometries, of animated architectures, rich with gems and fabulously lovely, of landscapes with heroic figures, of symbolic dramas trembling perpetually on the verge of the ultimate revelation. But I had not reckoned, it was evident, with the idiosyncrasies of my mental make-up, the facts of my temperament, training and habits.

The change which actually took place in that world was in no sense revolutionary. Half an hour after swallowing the drug I became aware of a slow dance of golden lights. A little later

there were sumptuous red surfaces swelling and expanding from bright nodes of energy that vibrated with a continuously changing, patterned life. At another time the closing of my eyes revealed a complex of gray structures, within which pale bluish spheres kept emerging into intense solidity and, having emerged, would slide noiselessly upwards, out of sight. But at no time were there faces or forms of men or animals. I saw no landscapes, no enormous spaces, no magical growth and metamorphosis of buildings, nothing remotely like a drama or a parable. The other world to which mescaline admitted me was not the world of visions; it existed out there, in what I could see with my eyes open. The great change was in the realm of objective fact. What had happened to my subjective universe was relatively unimportant.

I took my pill at eleven. An hour and a half later, I was sitting in my study, looking intently at a small glass vase. The vase contained only three flowers — a full-blown Belie of Portugal rose, shell pink with a hint at every petal's base of a hotter, flammier hue; a large magenta and cream-colored carnation; and, pale purple at the end of its broken stalk, the bold heraldic blossom of an iris. Fortuitous and provisional, the little nosegay broke all the rules of traditional good taste. At breakfast that morning I had been struck by the lively dissonance of its colors. But that was no longer the point. I was not looking now at an unusual flower arrangement. I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation — the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence.

"Is it agreeable?" somebody asked. (During this part of the experiment, all conversations were recorded on a dictating machine, and it has been possible for me to refresh my memory of what was said.)

"Neither agreeable nor disagreeable," I answered. "It just is."

Istigkeit — wasn't that the word Meister Eckhart liked to use? "Is-ness." The Being of Platonic philosophy, except that Plato seems to have made the enormous, the grotesque mistake of separating Being from becoming and identifying it with the mathematical abstraction of the Idea. He could never, poor fellow, have seen a bunch of flowers shining with their own inner light and all but quivering under the pressure of the significance with which they were charged; could never have perceived that what rose and iris and carnation so intensely signified was nothing more, and nothing less, than what they were, a transience that was yet eternal life, a perpetual perishing that was at the same time pure Being, a bundle of minute, unique particulars in which, by some unspeakable and yet self-evident paradox, was to be seen the divine source of all existence.

I continued to look at the flowers, and in their living light I seemed to detect the qualitative equivalent of breathing, but of a breathing without returns to a starting point, with no recurrent ebbs but only a repeated flow from beauty to heightened beauty, from deeper to ever deeper meaning. Words like "grace" and "transfiguration" came to my mind, and this, of course, was what, among other things, they stood for. My eyes traveled from the rose to the carnation, and from that feathery incandescence to the smooth scrolls of sentient amethyst which were the iris. The Beatific Vision, *Sat Chit Ananda*, Being-Awareness-Bliss-for the first time I understood, not on the verbal level, not by inchoate hints or at a distance, but precisely and completely what those prodigious syllables referred to. And then I remembered a passage I had read in one of Suzuki's essays. "What is the Dharma-Body of the Buddha?" ("the Dharma-Body of the Buddha" is another way of saying Mind, Suchness, the Void, the Godhead.) The question is asked in a Zen monastery by an earnest and bewildered novice. And with the prompt irrelevance of one of the Marx Brothers, the Master answers, "The hedge at the bottom of the garden." "And the man who realizes this truth," the novice dubiously inquires, "what, may I ask, is he?" Groucho gives him a whack over the shoulders with his staff and answers, "A golden-haired lion."

It had been, when I read it, only a vaguely pregnant piece of nonsense. Now it was all as clear as day, as evident as Euclid. Of course the Dharma-Body of the Buddha was the hedge at the bottom of the garden. At the same time, and no less obviously, it was these flowers, it was anything that I, or rather the blessed Not-I, released for a moment from my throttling embrace, cared to look at. The books, for example, with which my study walls were lined. Like the flowers, they glowed, when I looked at them, with brighter colors, a profounder significance. Red books, like rubies; emerald books; books bound in white jade; books of agate; of aquamarine, of yellow topaz; lapis lazuli books whose color was so intense, so intrinsically meaningful, that they seemed to be on the point of leaving the shelves to thrust themselves more insistently on my attention.

"What about spatial relationships?" the investigator inquired, as I was looking at the books.

It was difficult to answer. True, the perspective looked rather odd, and the walls of the room no longer seemed to meet in right angles. But these were not the really important facts. The really important facts were that spatial relationships had ceased to matter very much and that my mind was perceiving the world in terms of other than spatial categories. At ordinary times the eye concerns itself with such problems as Where?, How far?, How situated in relation to what? In the mescaline experience the implied questions to which the eye responds are of another order. Place and distance cease to be of much interest. The mind does its perceiving in terms of intensity of existence, profundity of significance, relationships within a pattern. I saw the books, but was not at all concerned with their positions in space. What I noticed, what impressed itself upon my mind was the fact that all of them glowed with living light and that in some the glory was more manifest than in others. In this context position and the three dimensions were beside the point. Not, of course, that the category of space had been abolished. When I got up and walked about, I could do so quite normally, without misjudging the whereabouts of objects. Space was still there; but it had lost its predominance. The mind was primarily concerned, not with measures and locations, but with being and meaning.

And along with indifference to space there went an even more complete indifference to time.

"There seems to be plenty of it," was all I would answer, when the investigator asked me to say what I felt about time.

Plenty of it, but exactly how much was entirely irrelevant. I could, of course, have looked at my watch; but my watch, I knew, was in another universe. My actual experience had been, was still, of an indefinite duration or alternatively of a perpetual present made up of one continually changing apocalypse.

Reflecting on my experience, I find myself agreeing with the eminent Cambridge philosopher, Dr. C. D. Broad, "that we should do well to consider much more seriously than we have hitherto been inclined to do the type of theory which Bergson put forward in connection with memory and sense perception. The suggestion is that the function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs is in the main eliminative and not productive. Each person is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe. The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by this mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge, by shutting out most of what we should otherwise perceive or remember at any moment, and leaving only that very small and special selection which is likely to be practically useful." According to such a theory, each one of us is potentially Mind at Large. But in so far as we are animals, our business is at all costs to survive. To make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funneled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system. What comes out at the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us to stay alive on the surface of this particular planet. To formulate and express the contents of this reduced awareness, man has invented and endlessly elaborated those symbol-systems and implicit philosophies which we call languages. Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he has been born, the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated records of other people's experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness and as it bedevils his sense of reality, so that he is all too apt to take his concepts for data, his words for actual things. That which, in the language of religion, is called "this world" is the universe of reduced awareness, expressed, and, as it were, petrified by language. The various "other worlds," with which human beings erratically make contact are so many elements in the totality of the awareness belonging to Mind at Large. Most people, most of the time, know only what comes through the reducing valve and is consecrated as genuinely real by the local language. Certain persons, however, seem to be born with a kind of by-pass that circumvents the reducing valve. In others temporary by-passes may be acquired either spontaneously, or as the result of deliberate "spiritual exercises," or through hypnosis, or by means of drugs. Through these permanent or temporary by-passes there flows, not indeed the perception "of everything that is happening everywhere in the universe" (for the by-pass does not abolish the reducing valve, which still excludes the total content of Mind at Large), but something more than, and above all something different from, the carefully selected utilitarian material which our narrowed, individual minds regard as a complete, or at least sufficient, picture of reality.

... how significant is the enormous heightening, under mescaline, of the perception of color! For certain animals it is biologically very important to be able to distinguish certain hues. But

beyond the limits of their utilitarian spectrum, most creatures are completely color blind. Bees, for example, spend most of their time "deflowering the fresh virgins of the spring"; but, as Von Frisch has shown, they can recognize only a very few colors. Man's highly developed color sense is a biological luxury, inestimably precious to him as an intellectual and spiritual being, but unnecessary to his survival as an animal. To judge by the adjectives which Homer puts into their mouths, the heroes of the Trojan War hardly excelled the bees in their capacity to distinguish colors. In this respect, at least, mankind's advance has been prodigious.

Mescaline raises all colors to a higher power and makes the percipient aware of innumerable fine shades of difference, to which, at ordinary times, he is completely blind. It would seem that, for Mind at Large, the so-called secondary characters of things are primary. Unlike Locke, it evidently feels that colors are more important, better worth attending to, than masses, positions and dimensions. Like mescaline takers, many mystics perceive supernaturally brilliant colors, not only with the inward eye, but even in the objective world around them. Similar reports are made by psychics and sensitives. There are certain mediums to whom the mescaline taker's brief revelation is a matter, during long periods, of daily and hourly experience.

"This is how one ought to see," I kept saying as I looked down at my trousers, or glanced at the jeweled books in the shelves, at the legs of my infinitely more than Van-Goghian chair. "This is how one ought to see, how things really are." And yet there were reservations. For if one always saw like this, one would never want to do anything else. Just looking, just being the divine Not-self of flower, of book, of chair, of flannel. That would be enough. But in that case what about other people? What about human relations? In the recording of that morning's conversations I find the question constantly repeated, "What about human relations?" How could one reconcile this timeless bliss of seeing as one ought to see with the temporal duties of doing what one ought to do and feeling as one ought to feel? "One ought to be able," I said, "to see these trousers as infinitely important and human beings as still more infinitely important." One ought — but in practice it seemed to be impossible. This participation in the manifest glory of things left no room, so to speak, for the ordinary, the necessary concerns of human existence, above all for concerns involving persons. For persons are selves and, in one respect at least, I was now a Not-self, simultaneously perceiving and being the Not-self of the things around me. To this new-born Not-self, the behavior, the appearance, the very thought of the self it had momentarily ceased to be, and of other selves, its one-time fellows, seemed not indeed distasteful (for distastefulness was not one of the categories in terms of which I was thinking), but enormously irrelevant. Compelled by the investigator to analyze and report on what I was doing (and how I longed to be left alone with Eternity in a flower, Infinity in four chair legs and the Absolute in the folds of a pair of flannel trousers!), I realized that I was deliberately avoiding the eyes of those who were with me in the room, deliberately refraining from being too much aware of them. One was my wife, the other a man I respected and greatly liked; but both belonged to the world from which, for the moment, mescaline had delivered me — the world of selves, of time, of moral judgments and utilitarian considerations, the world (and it was this aspect of human life which I wished, above all else, to forget) of self-assertion, of cocksureness, of overvalued words and idolatrously worshipped notions.

But meanwhile my question remained unanswered. How was this cleansed perception to be reconciled with a proper concern with human relations, with the necessary chores and duties, to say nothing of charity and practical compassion? The age-old debate between the actives and the contemplatives was being renewed, renewed, so far as I was concerned, with an unprecedented poignancy. For until this morning I had known contemplation only in its humbler, its more ordinary forms, as discursive thinking; as a rapt absorption in poetry or painting or music; as a patient waiting upon those inspirations, without which even the priestly writer cannot hope to accomplish anything; as occasional glimpses, in Nature, of Wordsworth's "something far more deeply interfused"; as systematic silence leading, sometimes, to hints of an "obscure knowledge." But now I knew contemplation at its height. At its height, but not yet in its fullness. For in its fullness the way of Mary includes the way of Martha and raises it, so to speak, to its own higher power. Mescaline opens up the way of Mary, but shuts the door on that of Martha. It gives access to contemplation — but to a contemplation that is incompatible with action and even with the will to action, the very thought of action. In the intervals between his revelations the mescaline taker is apt to feel that, though in one way everything is supremely as it should be, in another there is something wrong. His problem is essentially the same as that which confronts the quietist, the *arhat* and, on another level, the landscape painter and the painter of human still lives. Mescaline can never solve that problem; it

can only pose it, apocalyptically, for those to whom it had never before presented itself. The full and final solution can be found only by those who are prepared to implement the right kind of *Weltanschauung* by means of the right kind of behavior and the right kind of constant and unstrained alertness. Over against the quietist stands the active-contemplative, the saint, the man who, in Eckhart's phrase, is ready to come down from the seventh heaven in order to bring a cup of water to his sick brother. Over against the *arhat*, retreating from appearances into an entirely transcendental Nirvana, stands the Bodhisattva, for whom Suchness and the world of contingencies are one, and for whose boundless compassion every one of those contingencies is an occasion not only for transfiguring insight, but also for the most practical charity. And in the universe of art, over against Vermeer and the other painters of human still lives, over against the masters of Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, over against Constable and Turner, against Sisley and Seurat and Cézanne, stands the all-inclusive art of Rembrandt. These are enormous names, inaccessible eminences. For myself, on this memorable May morning, I could only be grateful for an experience which had shown me, more clearly than I had ever seen it before, the true nature of the challenge and the completely liberating response.

Let me add, before we leave this subject, that there is no form of contemplation, even the most quietistic, which is without its ethical values. Half at least of all morality is negative and consists in keeping out of mischief. The Lord's Prayer is less than fifty words long, and six of those words are devoted to asking God not to lead us into temptation. The one-sided contemplative leaves undone many things that he ought to do; but to make up for it, he refrains from doing a host of things he ought not to do. The sum of evil, Pascal remarked, would be much diminished if men could only learn to sit quietly in their rooms. The contemplative whose perception has been cleansed does not have to stay in his room. He can go about his business, so completely satisfied to see and be a part of the divine Order of Things that he will never even be tempted to indulge in what Traherne called "the dirty Devices of the world." When we feel ourselves to be sole heirs of the universe, when "the sea flows in our veins. . . and the stars are our jewels," when all things are perceived as infinite and holy, what motive can we have for covetousness or self-assertion, for the pursuit of power or the drearier forms of pleasure? Contemplatives are not likely to become gamblers, or procurers, or drunkards; they do not as a rule preach intolerance, or make war; do not find it necessary to rob, swindle or grind the faces of the poor. And to these enormous negative virtues we may add another which, though hard to define, is both positive and important. The *arhat* and the quietist may not practice contemplation in its fullness; but if they practice it at all, they may bring back enlightening reports of another, a transcendent country of the mind; and if they practice it in the height, they will become conduits through which some beneficent influence can flow out of that other country into a world of darkened selves, chronically dying for lack of it.

Most visualizers are transformed by mescaline into visionaries. Some of them — and they are perhaps more numerous than is generally supposed — require no transformation; they are visionaries all the time. The mental species to which Blake belonged is fairly widely distributed even in the urban-industrial societies of the present day. The poet-artist's uniqueness does not consist in the fact that (to quote from his Descriptive Catalogue) he actually saw "those wonderful originals called in the Sacred Scriptures the Cherubim." It does not consist in the fact that "these wonderful originals seen in my visions, were some of them one hundred feet in height . . . all containing mythological and recondite meaning." It consists solely in his ability to render, in words or (somewhat less successfully) in line and color, some hint at least of a not excessively uncommon experience. The untalented visionary may perceive an inner reality no less tremendous, beautiful and significant than the world beheld by Blake; but he lacks altogether the ability to express, in literary or plastic symbols, what he has seen.

From the records of religion and the surviving monuments of poetry and the plastic arts it is very plain that, at most times and in most places, men have attached more importance to the inscape than to objective existents, have felt that what they saw with their eyes shut possessed a spiritually higher significance than what they saw with their eyes open. The reason? Familiarity breeds contempt, and how to survive is a problem ranging in urgency from the chronically tedious to the excruciating. The outer world is what we wake up to every morning of our lives, is the place where, willy-nilly, we must try to make our living. In the inner world there is neither work nor monotony. We visit it only in dreams and musings, and its strangeness is such that we never find the same world on two successive occasions. What wonder, then, if human beings in their search for the divine have generally preferred to look within! Generally, but not always. In their art no less than in their religion, the Taoists and the Zen Buddhists looked beyond visions to the Void, and through the Void at "the ten thousand

things" of objective reality. Because of their doctrine of the Word made flesh, Christians should have been able, from the first, to adopt a similar attitude towards the universe around them. But because of the doctrine of the Fall, they found it very hard to do so. As recently as three hundred years ago an expression of thoroughgoing world denial and even world condemnation was both orthodox and comprehensible. "We should feel wonder at nothing at all in Nature except only the Incarnation of Christ." In the seventeenth century, Lallemand's phrase seemed to make sense. Today it has the ring of madness.

. . . Most men and women lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape, the longing to transcend themselves if only for a few moments, is and has always been one of the principal appetites of the soul. Art and religion, carnivals and saturnalia, dancing and listening to oratory — all these have served, in H. G. Wells's phrase, as Doors in the Wall. And for private, for everyday use there have always been chemical intoxicants. All the vegetable sedatives and narcotics, all the euphorics that grow on trees, the hallucinogens that ripen in berries or can be squeezed from roots — all, without exception, have been known and systematically used by human beings from time immemorial. And to these natural modifiers of consciousness modern science has added its quota of synthetics — chloral, for example, and benzedrine, the bromides and the barbiturates.

Most of these modifiers of consciousness cannot now be taken except under doctor's orders, or else illegally and at considerable risk. For unrestricted use the West has permitted only alcohol and tobacco. All the other chemical Doors in the Wall are labeled Dope, and their unauthorized takers are Fiends.

To most people, mescaline is almost completely innocuous. Unlike alcohol, it does not drive the taker into the kind of uninhibited action which results in brawls, crimes of violence and traffic accidents. A man under the influence of mescaline quietly minds his own business. Moreover, the business he minds is an experience of the most enlightening kind, which does not have to be paid for (and this is surely important) by a compensatory hangover. Of the long-range consequences of regular mescaline taking we know very little. The Indians who consume peyote buttons do not seem to be physically or morally degraded by the habit. However, the available evidence is still scarce and sketchy. Although obviously superior to cocaine, opium, alcohol and tobacco, mescaline is not yet the ideal drug. Along with the happily transfigured majority of mescaline takers there is a minority that finds in the drug only hell or purgatory. Moreover, for a drug that is to be used, like alcohol, for general consumption, its effects last for an inconveniently long time. But chemistry and physiology are capable nowadays of practically anything. If the psychologists and sociologists will define the ideal, the neurologists and pharmacologists can be relied upon to discover the means whereby that ideal can be realized or at least (for perhaps this kind of ideal can never, in the very nature of things, be fully realized) more nearly approached than in the wine-bibbing past, the whisky-drinking, marijuana-smoking and barbiturate-swallowing present.

The urge to transcend self-conscious selfhood is, as I have said, a principal appetite of the soul. When, for whatever reason, men and women fail to transcend themselves by means of worship, good works and spiritual exercises, they are apt to resort to religion's chemical surrogates—alcohol and "goof pills" in the modern West, alcohol and opium in the East, hashish in the Mohammedan world, alcohol and marijuana in Central America, alcohol and coca in the Andes, alcohol and the barbiturates in the more up-to-date regions of South America. In *Poisons Sacrés, Ivresses Divines* Philippe de Felice has written at length and with a wealth of documentation on the immemorial connection between religion and the taking of drugs. Here, in summary or in direct quotation, are his conclusions. The employment for religious purposes of toxic substances is "extraordinarily widespread. . . . The practices studied in this volume can be observed in every region of the earth, among primitives no less than among those who have reached a high pitch of civilization. We are therefore dealing not with exceptional facts, which might justifiably be overlooked, but with a general and, in the widest sense of the word, a human phenomenon, the kind of phenomenon which cannot be disregarded by anyone who is trying to discover what religion is, and what are the deep needs which it must satisfy."

"I have always found," Blake wrote rather bitterly, "that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise. This they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning."

Systematic reasoning is something we could not, as a species or as individuals, possibly do without. But neither, if we are to remain sane, can we possibly do without direct perception, the more unsystematic the better, of the inner and outer worlds into which we have been born. This given reality is an infinite which passes all understanding and yet admits of being directly and in some sort totally apprehended. It is a transcendence belonging to another order than the

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by Albert Hofmann

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human, and yet it may be present to us as a felt immanence, an experienced participation. To be enlightened is to be aware, always, of total reality in its immanent otherness-to be aware of it and yet to remain in a condition to survive as an animal, to think and feel as a human being, to resort whenever expedient to systematic reasoning. Our goal is to discover that we have always been where we ought to be. Unhappily we make the task exceedingly difficult for ourselves. Meanwhile, however, there are gratuitous graces in the form of partial and fleeting realizations. Under a more realistic, a less exclusively verbal system of education than ours, every Angel (in Blake's sense of that word) would be permitted as a sabbatical treat, would be urged and even, if necessary, compelled to take an occasional trip through some chemical Door in the Wall into the world of transcendental experience. If it terrified him, it would be unfortunate but probably salutary. If it brought him a brief but timeless illumination, so much the better. In either case the Angel might lose a little of the confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning and the consciousness of having read all the books.

Near the end of his life Aquinas experienced Infused Contemplation. Thereafter he refused to go back to work on his unfinished book. Compared with this, everything he had read and argued about and written — Aristotle and the Sentences, the Questions, the Propositions, the majestic Summas — was no better than chaff or straw. For most intellectuals such a sit-down strike would be inadvisable, even morally wrong. But the Angelic Doctor had done more systematic reasoning than any twelve ordinary Angels, and was already ripe for death. He had earned the right, in those last months of his mortality, to turn away from merely symbolic straw and chaff to the bread of actual and substantial Fact. For Angels of a lower order and with better prospects of longevity, there must be a return to the straw. But the man who comes back through the Door in the Wall will never be quite the same as the man who went out. He will be wiser but less cocksure, happier but less self-satisfied, humbler in acknowledging his ignorance yet better equipped to understand the relationship of words to things, of systematic reasoning to the unfathomable Mystery which it tries, forever vainly, to comprehend.

The Mysteries of Eleusis, which were celebrated annually in the fall, over an interval of approximately 2,000 years, from about 1500 B.C. until the fourth century A.D., were intimately connected with the ceremonies and festivals in honor of the god Dionysus. These Mysteries were established by the goddess of agriculture, Demeter, as thanks for the recovery of her daughter Persephone, whom Hades, the god of the underworld, had abducted. A further thanks offering was the ear of grain, which was presented by the two goddesses to Triptolemus, the first high priest of Eleusis. They taught him the cultivation of grain, which Triptolemus then disseminated over the whole globe. Persephone, however, was not always allowed to remain with her mother, because she had taken nourishment from Hades, contrary to the order of the highest gods. As punishment she had to return to the underworld for a part of the year. During this time, it was winter on the earth, the plants died and were withdrawn into the ground, to awaken to new life early in the year with Persephone's journey to earth.

The myth of Demeter, Persephone, Hades, and the other gods, which was enacted as a drama, formed, however, only the external framework of events. The climax of the yearly ceremonies, which began with a procession from Athens to Eleusis lasting several days, was the concluding ceremony with the initiation, which took place in the night. The initiates were forbidden by penalty of death to divulge what they had learned, beheld, in the innermost, holiest chamber of the temple, the *tekteterion* (goal). Not one of the multitude that were initiated into the secret of Eleusis has ever done this. Pausanias, Plato, many Roman emperors like Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius, and many other known personages of antiquity were party to this initiation. It must have been an illumination, a visionary glimpse of a deeper reality, an insight into the true basis of the universe. That can be concluded from the statements of initiates about the value, about the importance of the vision. Thus it is reported in a Homeric Hymn: "Blissful is he among men on Earth, who has beheld that! He who has not been initiated into the holy Mysteries, who has had no part therein, remains a corpse in gloomy darkness." Pindar speaks of the Eleusinian benediction with the following words: "Blissful is he, who after having beheld this enters on the way beneath the Earth. He knows the end of life as well as its divinely granted beginning." Cicero, also a famous initiate, likewise put in first position the splendor that fell upon his life from Eleusis, when he said: "Not only have we received the reason there, that we may live in joy, but also, besides, that we may die with better hope."

How could the mythological representation of such an obvious occurrence, which runs its course annually before our eyes the seed grain that is dropped into the earth, dies there, in order to allow a new plant, new life, to ascend into the light-prove to be such a deep, comforting experience as that attested by the cited reports? It is traditional knowledge that the initiates were furnished with a potion, the *kykeon*, for the final ceremony. It is also known that barley extract and mint were ingredients of the *kykeon*. Religious scholars and scholars of mythology, like Karl Kerényi, from whose book on the Eleusinian Mysteries (Rhein-Verlag, Zurich, 1962) the preceding statements were taken, and with whom I was associated in relation to the research on this mysterious potion [In the English publication of Kerényi's book *Eleusis* (Schocken Books, New York, 1977) a reference is made to this collaboration.], are of the opinion that the *kykeon* was mixed with an hallucinogenic drug. [In *The Road to Eleusis* by R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann, and Carl A. P. Ruck (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1978) the possibility is discussed that the *kykeon* could have acted through an LSD-like preparation of ergot.] That would make understandable the ecstatic-visionary experience of the Demeter/Persephone myth, as a symbol of the cycle of life and death in both a comprehensive and timeless reality.

When the Gothic king Alarich, coming from the north, invaded Greece in 396 A.D. and destroyed the sanctuary of Eleusis, it was not only the end of a religious center, but it also signified the decisive downfall of the ancient world. With the monks that accompanied Alarich, Christianity penetrated into the country that must be regarded as the cradle of European culture.

The cultural-historical meaning of the Eleusinian Mysteries, their influence on European intellectual history, can scarcely be overestimated. Here suffering humankind found a cure for

its rational, objective, cleft intellect, in a mystical totality experience, that let it believe in immortality, in an everlasting existence.

This belief had survived in early Christianity, although with other symbols. It is found as a promise, even in particular passages of the Gospels, most clearly in the Gospel according to John, as in Chapter 14:120. Jesus speaks to his disciples, as he takes leave of them:

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever;

Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

This promise constitutes the heart of my Christian beliefs and my call to natural-scientific research: we will attain to knowledge of the universe through the spirit of truth, and thereby to understanding of our being one with the deepest, most comprehensive reality, God.

Ecclesiastical Christianity, determined by the duality of creator and creation, has, however, with its nature-alienated religiosity largely obliterated the Eleusinian-Dionysian legacy of antiquity. In the Christian sphere of belief, only special blessed men have attested to a timeless, comforting reality, experienced in a spontaneous vision, an experience to which in antiquity the elite of innumerable generations had access through the initiation at Eleusis. The unio mystica of Catholic saints and the visions that the representatives of Christian mysticism-Jakob Boehme, Meister Eckhart, Angelus Silesius, Thomas Traherne, William Blake, and others describe in their writings, are obviously essentially related to the enlightenment that the initiates to the Eleusinian Mysteries experienced.

The fundamental importance of a mystical experience, for the recovery of people in Western industrial societies who are sickened by a one-sided, rational, materialistic world view, is today given primary emphasis, not only by adherents to Eastern religious movements like Zen Buddhism, but also by leading representatives of academic psychiatry. Of the appropriate literature, we will here refer only to the books of Balthasar Staehelin, the Basel psychiatrist working in Zurich. [*Haben und Sein* (1969), *Die Welt als Du* (1970), *Urvertrauen und zweite Wirklichkeit* (1973), and *Der finale Mensch* (1976); all published by Theologischer Verlag, Zurich.] They make reference to numerous other authors who deal with the same problem. Today a type of "metamedicine," "metapsychology," and "metapsychiatry" is beginning to call upon the metaphysical element in people, which manifests itself as an experience of a deeper, duality-surmounting reality, and to make this element a basic healing principle in therapeutic practice.

In addition, it is most significant that not only medicine but also wider circles of our society consider the overcoming of the dualistic, cleft world view to be a prerequisite and basis for the recovery and spiritual renewal of occidental civilization and culture. This renewal could lead to the renunciation of the materialistic philosophy of life and the development of a new reality consciousness.

As a path to the perception of a deeper, comprehensive reality, in which the experiencing individual is also sheltered, meditation, in its different forms, occupies a prominent place today. The essential difference between meditation and prayer in the usual sense, which is based upon the duality of creator/creation, is that meditation aspires to the abolishment of the I-you-barrier by a fusing of object and subject, of sender and receiver, of objective reality and self.

Objective reality, the world view produced by the spirit of scientific inquiry, is the myth of our time. It has replaced the ecclesiastical-Christian and mythical-Apollonian world view.

But this ever broadening factual knowledge, which constitutes objective reality, need not be a desecration. On the contrary, if it only advances deep enough, it inevitably leads to the inexplicable, primal ground of the universe: the wonder, the mystery of the divine in the microcosm of the atom, in the macrocosm of the spiral nebula; in the seeds of plants, in the body and soul of people.

Meditation begins at the limits of objective reality, at the farthest point yet reached by rational knowledge and perception. Meditation thus does not mean rejection of objective reality; on the contrary, it consists of a penetration to deeper dimensions of reality. It is not

escape into an imaginary dream world; rather it seeks after the comprehensive truth of objective reality, by simultaneous, stereoscopic contemplation of its surfaces and depths.

It could become of fundamental importance, and be not merely a transient fashion of the present, if more and more people today would make a daily habit of devoting an hour, or at least a few minutes, to meditation. As a result of the meditative penetration and broadening of the natural-scientific world view, a new, deepened reality consciousness would have to evolve, which would increasingly become the property of all humankind. This could become the basis of a new religiosity, which would not be based on belief in the dogmas of various religions, but rather on perception through the "spirit of truth." What is meant here is a perception, a reading and understanding of the text at first hand, "out of the book that God's finger has written" (Paracelsus), out of the creation.

The transformation of the objective world view into a deepened and thereby religious reality consciousness can be accomplished gradually, by continuing practice of meditation. It can also come about, however, as a sudden enlightenment; a visionary experience. It is then particularly profound, blessed, and meaningful. Such a mystical experience may nevertheless "not be induced even by decade-long meditation," as Balthasar Staehelin writes. Also, it does not happen to everyone, although the capacity for mystical experience belongs to the essence of human spirituality.

Nevertheless, at Eleusis, the mystical vision, the healing, comforting experience, could be arranged in the prescribed place at the appointed time, for all of the multitudes who were initiated into the holy Mysteries. This could be accounted for by the fact that an hallucinogenic drug came into use; this, as already mentioned, is something that religious scholars believe.

The characteristic property of hallucinogens, to suspend the boundaries between the experiencing self and the outer world in an ecstatic, emotional experience, makes it possible with their help, and after suitable internal and external preparation, as it was accomplished in a perfect way at Eleusis, to evoke a mystical experience according to plan, so to speak.

Meditation is a preparation for the same goal that was aspired to and was attained in the Eleusinian Mysteries. Accordingly it seems feasible that in the future, with the help of LSD, the mystical vision, crowning meditation, could be made accessible to an increasing number of practitioners of meditation

I see the true importance of LSD in the possibility of providing material aid to meditation aimed at the mystical experience.

A Psychedelic Experience - Fact or Fantasy?

by Alan Watts

This essay appeared in *LSD, The Consciousness-Expanding Drug*

David Solomon, Editor, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York © David Solomon 1964

Since at least 1500 B.C. men have, from time to time, held the view that our normal vision of the world is a hallucination—a dream, a figment of the mind, or, to use the Hindu word which means both art and illusion, a *maya*. The implication is that, if this is so, life need never be taken seriously. It is a fantasy, a play, a drama to be enjoyed. It does not really matter, for one day (perhaps in the moment of death) the illusion will dissolve, and each one of us will awaken to discover that he himself is what there is and all that there is—the very root and ground of the universe, or the ultimate and eternal space in which things and events come and go.

This is not simply an idea which someone “thought up,” like science fiction or a philosophical theory. It is the attempt to express an experience in which consciousness itself, the basic sensation of being “I,” undergoes a remarkable change. We do not know much about these experiences. They are relatively common, and arise in every part of the world. They occur to both children and adults. They may last for a few seconds and come once in a lifetime, or they may happen repeatedly and constitute a permanent change of consciousness. With baffling impartiality they may descend upon those who never heard of them, as upon those who have spent years trying to cultivate them by some type of discipline. They have been regarded, equally, as a disease of consciousness with symptoms everywhere the same, like measles, and as a vision of higher reality such as comes in moments of scientific or psychological insight. They may turn people into monsters and megalomaniacs, or transform them into saints and sages. While there is no sure way of inducing these experiences, a favorable atmosphere may be created by intense concentration, by fasting, by sensory deprivation, by hyper-oxygenation, by prolonged emotional stress, by profound relaxation, or by the use of certain drugs.

Experiences of this kind underlie some of the great world religions—Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism in particular, and, to a much lesser extent, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As expressed in the doctrines of these religions, they purport to be an account of “the way things are” and therefore invite comparison with descriptions of the universe and of man given by physicists and biologists. They contradict common sense so violently and are accompanied with such a powerful sense of authenticity and reality (more real than reality is a common description) that men have always wondered whether they are divine revelations or insidious delusions.

For undoubtedly they are happening. The dancing, kaleidoscopic arabesques which appear before closed eyes are surely an observation of some reality, though not, perhaps, in the physical world outside the skin. But are they rearranged memories? Structures in the nervous system? Archetypes of the collective unconscious? Electronic patterns such as often dance on the TV screen? What, too, are the fern-like structures which are so often seen — the infinitude of branches upon branches upon branches, or analogous shapes? Are these a glimpse of some kind of analytical process in the brain, similar to the wiring patterns in a computer? We really have no idea, but the more carefully observers can record verbal descriptions and visual pictures of these phenomena, the more likely that neurologists or physicists or even mathematicians will turn up the physical processes to which they correspond. The point is that these visions are not mere imagination, as if there had ever been anything mere about imagination. The human mind does not just perversely invent utterly useless images out of nowhere at all. Every image tells us something about the mind or the brain or the organism in which it is found.

The effects of the psychedelics vary so much from person to person and from situation to situation that it is well nigh impossible to say with any exactitude that they create certain particular and invariable changes of consciousness. I would not go so far as to say that the chemical effects are simply featureless, providing no more than a vivid mirror to reflect the fantasies and unconscious dispositions of the individuals involved. For there are certain types of change which are usual enough to be considered characteristic of psychedelics: the sense of slowed or arrested time, and the alteration of “ego boundary” — that is, of the sensation of one's own identity.

The feeling that time has relaxed its pace may, to some extent, be the result of having set aside the better part of a day just to observe one's own consciousness, and to watch for interesting changes in one's perception of such ordinary things as reflected sunlight on the floor, the grain in wood, the texture of linen, or the sound of voices across the street. My own experience has never been of a distortion of these perceptions, as in looking at oneself in a concave mirror. It is rather that every perception becomes — to use a metaphor — more resonant. The chemical seems to provide consciousness with a sounding box, or its equivalent, for all the senses, so that sight, touch, taste, smell, and imagination are intensified like the voice of someone singing in the bathtub.

The change of ego boundary sometimes begins from this very resonance of the senses. The intensification and “deepening” of color, sound and texture lends them a peculiar transparency. One seems to be aware of them more than ever as vibration, electronic and luminous. As this feeling develops it appears that these vibrations are continuous with one's own consciousness and that the external world is in some odd way inside the mindbrain. It appears, too, with overwhelming obviousness, that the inside and the outside do not exclude one another and are not actually separate. They go together; they imply one another, like front and back, in such a way that they become polarized. As, therefore, the poles of a magnet are the extremities of a single body, it appears that the inside and the outside, the subject and the object, the self and the world, the voluntary and the involuntary, are the poles of a single process which is my real and hitherto unknown self. This new self has no location. It is not something like a traditional soul, using the body as a temporary house. To ask where it is, is like asking where the universe is. Things in space have a where, but the thing that space is in doesn't need to be anywhere. It is simply what there is, just plain basic isness!

How easily, then, an unsophisticated person might exclaim, “I have just discovered that I am God!” Yet if, during such an experience, one retains any critical faculties at all, it will be clear that anyone else in the same state of consciousness will also be God. It will be clear, too, that the “God” in question is not the God of popular theology, the Master Technician who controls, creates, and understands everything in the universe. Were it so, a person in this state should be able to give correct answers to all questions of fact. He would know the exact height of Mount Whitney in millimeters. On the other hand, this awareness of a deeper and universal self would correspond exactly with that other type of God which mystics have called the “divine ground” of the universe, a sort of intelligent and superconscious space containing the whole cosmos as a mirror contains images

... though the analogy fails in so far as it suggests something immense: we cannot picture sizelessness.

Anyone moving into completely unfamiliar territory may at first misunderstand and misinterpret what he sees, as is so evident from the first impressions of visitors to foreign lands where patterns of culture differ radically from their own. When Europeans depicted their first impressions of China, they made the roofs of houses exaggeratedly curly and people's eyes slanted at least 45 degrees from the horizontal. Contrariwise, the Japanese saw all Europeans as red-haired, sunken-eyed goblins with immensely long noses. But the unfamiliarities of foreign cultures are nothing to those of one's own inner workings. What is there in the experience of clear blue sky to suggest the structure of the optical nerves? Comparably, what is there in the sound of a human voice on the radio to suggest the formations of tubes and transistors? I raise this question because it is obvious that any chemically induced alteration of the nervous system must draw the attention of that system to itself. I am not normally aware that the sensation of blue sky is a state of the eyes and brain, but if I see wandering spots that are neither birds nor flying saucers, I know that these are an abnormality within the optical system itself. In other words, I am enabled, by virtue of this abnormality, to become conscious of one of the instruments of consciousness. But this is most unfamiliar territory.

Yet how is this long-ingrained sense of insular identity to be overcome? How is twentieth-century man to gain a feeling of his existence consistent with twentieth-century knowledge? We need very urgently to know that we are not strangers and aliens in the physical universe. We were not dropped here by divine whim or mechanical fluke out of some other universe altogether. We did not arrive, like birds on barren branches; we grew out of this world, like leaves and fruit. Our universe “humans” just as a rosebush “flowers.” We are living in a world where men all over the planet are linked by an immense network of communications, and where science has made us theoretically aware of our interdependence with the entire domain of organic and inorganic nature. But our ego-feeling, our style of personal identity, is more appropriate to men living in fortified castles.

There seems to me a strong possibility that the psychedelics (as a medicine rather than a diet) may help us to “trigger” a new sense of identity, providing the initial boost to get us out of the habit of restricting “I” to a vague center within the skin. That they make us aware that our whole knowledge of the external world is a state of our own bodies is not a merely technical and trivial discovery. It is the obverse of the fact that our own bodies are functions, or behaviors, of the whole external world. This—at first— weird and mystical sensation of “unity with the cosmos” has been objectively verified. The mystic’s subjective experience of his identity with “the All” is the scientist’s objective description of ecological relationship, of the organism/environment as a unified field.

Our general failure (over the past three thousand years of human history) to notice the inseparability of things, and to be aware of our own basic unity with the external world, is the result of specializing in a particular kind of consciousness. For we have very largely based culture and civilization on concentrated attention, on using the mind as a spotlight rather than a floodlight, and by this means analyzing the world into separate bits. Concentrated attention is drummed into us in schools; it is essential to the three R’s; it is the foundation of all careful thought and detailed description, all high artistic technique and intellectual discipline. But the price we pay for this vision of the world in vivid detail, bit by bit, is that we lose sight of the relationships and unities between the bits. Furthermore, a form of attention which looks at the world bit by bit doesn’t have time to examine all possible bits; it has to be programmed (or prejudiced) to look only at significant bits, at things and events which are relevant to certain preselected ends—survival, social or financial advancement, and other fixed goals which exclude the possibility of being open to surprises, and to those delights which are extra special because they come without being sought.

In my own experience, which is shared by very many others, the psychedelics expand attention. They make the spotlight of consciousness a floodlight which not only exposes ignored relationships and unities but also brings to light unsuspected details—details normally ignored because of their lack of significance, or their irrelevance to some prejudice of what ought to be. (For example, the tiniest hairs on people’s faces and blotchy variations of skin color, not really supposed to be there, become marvelously visible.) There is thus good reason to believe that the psychedelics are the opposite of hallucinogens insofar as they decrease the selectivity of the senses and expose consciousness to events beyond those that are supposed to deserve notice.

Time after time, this unprogrammed mode of attention, looking *at* things without looking *for* things, reveals the unbelievable beauty of the everyday world. Under the influence of programmed attention, our vision of the world tends to be somewhat dusty and drab. This is for the same reason that staring at things makes them blurred, and that trying to get the utmost out of a particular pleasure makes it something of a disappointment. Intense beauty and intense pleasure are always gratuitous, and are revealed only to senses that are not seeking and straining. For our nerves are not muscles; to push them is to reduce their efficiency.

What, finally, of the strong impression delivered both by the psychedelics and by many forms of mystical experience that the world is in some way an illusion? A difficulty here is that the word “illusion” is currently used pejoratively, as the negative of everything real, serious, important, valuable, and worthwhile. Is this because moralists and metaphysicians are apt to be personality types lacking the light touch? Illusion is related etymologically to the Latin *ludere*, to play, and thus is distinguished from reality as the drama is distinguished from “real life.” In Hindu philosophy, the world is seen as a drama in which all the parts—each person, animal, flower, stone, and star—are roles or masks of the one supreme Self, which plays the *lila* or game of hide and seek with itself for ever and ever, dismembering itself as the Many and remembering itself as the One through endless cycles of time, in the spirit of a child tossing stones into a pond through a long afternoon in summer. The sudden awakening of the mystical experience is therefore the one Self remembering itself as the real foundation of the seemingly individual and separate organism.

Thus the Hindu *maya*, or world illusion, is not necessarily something bad. *Maya* is a complex word signifying the art, skill, dexterity, and cunning of the supreme Self in the exercise of its playful, magical, and creative power. The power of an actor so superb that he is taken in by his own performance. The Godhead amazing itself, getting lost in a maze.

Classical illustrations of *maya* include the apparently continuous circle of fire made by a whirling torch, and of the continuity of time and moving events by the whirring succession of *ksana*, or atomic instants. Physicists use similar metaphors in trying to explain how vibrating wavicles produce the illusion of solid material. The impenetrability of granite, they say, is something like the apparently solid disk made by the blades of an electric fan: it is an intensely

rapid motion of the same minute orbits of light that constitute our fingers. Physics and optics have also much to say about the fact that all reality, all existence is a matter of relationship and transaction. Consider the formula

$$\begin{array}{ccc} a & & b = \text{Rainbow} \\ & & c \end{array}$$

where *a* is the sun, *b* is moisture in the atmosphere, and *c* is an observer, all three being at the same time in a certain angular relationship. Deduct any one term, *a*, *b* or *c*, or arrange them in positions outside the correct angular relationship, and the phenomenon “rainbow” will not exist. In other words, the actual existence of rainbows depends as much upon creatures with eyes as it depends upon the sun and moisture in the atmosphere. Common sense accepts this in respect to diaphanous things like rainbows which back off into the distance when we try to reach them. But it has great difficulty in accepting the fact that chunky things like apartment buildings and basic things like time and space exist in just the same way—only in relation to certain structures known as organisms with nervous systems.

Our difficulty in accepting for ourselves so important a part in the actual creation or manifestation of the world comes, of course, from this thorough habituation to the feeling that we are strangers in the universe—that human consciousness is a fluke of nature, that the world is an external object which we confront, that its immense size reduces us to pitiful unimportance, or that geological and astronomical structures are somehow more real (hard and solid?) than organisms. But these are actually mythological images of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—ideas which, for a while, seemed extremely plausible, mostly for the reason that they appeared to be hard-boiled, down to earth and tough-minded, a currently fashionable posture for the scientist. Despite the lag between advanced scientific ideas and the common sense of even the educated public, the mythology of man as a hapless fluke trapped in a mindless mechanism is breaking down. The end of this century may find us, at last, thoroughly at home in our own world, swimming in the ocean of relativity as joyously as dolphins in the water.